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ABSTRACT

Program rationale, goals, and strategies are outlined in this description of Arizona-based centers which trained migrant workers in the use of microcomputers for business and clerical applications. Topics include the need to create new jobs for displaced farm workers, the assets farm workers bring to the business world, the training-related problems encountered, and the ways of supporting migrant workers placed in new jobs. Included is a brief history of the training agency, Portable Practical Educational Preparation-Training for Employment Centers (PPEP-TEC), and a list of six related references. (JHZ)

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# OUT OF THE FIELDS AND INTO COMPUTERS

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ERIC DIGEST

# MIGRANT EDUCATION

## OUT OF THE FIELDS AND INTO COMPUTERS

Training programs can provide opportunities for migrant farm workers to move into the more professional and higher paying jobs.

**Can migrant farm workers make the transition from field to office?**

TUCSON - A year ago, 20-year-old Marina DeLa Cruz was a field worker. She spent 15 hours a day wielding a hoe, chopping weeds in cotton fields near Stanfield, west of Casa Grande, Arizona. For her strenous work, done when temperatures soared above 100 degrees, DeLa Cruz earned $3.35 an hour. Because her job was a seasonal one usually lasting only three or four months a year, her annual income was about $3,500.

Today, DeLa Cruz operates a computer in an office at Gates Lear Jet Corporation in Tucson. She works eight hours a day, forty hours a week, in a climate-controlled setting and earns $200 a week.

DeLa Cruz is one of 16 young Arizona women who recently have made the transition from field to office as the result of six months of training they received in computer technology, business techniques, and office procedures. The training was provided by Portable Practical Educational Preparation-Training for Employment Centers (PPEP-TEC), a Tucson-based non-profit corporation.

**Why should migrants learn another skill other than farm work?**

Since 1953 technology has been displacing migrant farm workers in large numbers. In California, for example, one of the state universities invented a tomato-harvesting machine that resulted in the displacement of 40,000 workers. There is a need to find an alternative skill for those displaced adults and their children so they can compete in a new job market.

**Why should migrants be taught computer literacy?**

The rationale of PPEP-TEC is to tackle the root of the problem of displacement. The concept is to use the same high technology that is displacing the farm workers to create jobs for them and their children. Thus, PPEP-TEC introduces the farm workers to the field of microcomputers to insure their access into the computer age.

**What assets do farm workers bring to the work world?**

Farm workers possess all the vital ingredients that today's work world requires. Farm workers certainly understand the work ethic. Farm workers have planted, nurtured, and harvested food since the beginning of history. They know that one must arrive at work on time, work hard, and work whatever hours necessary to get the job done. This kind of commitment is the "dream" of any employer in today's work world.

In the southern and border states where commercial ties with Mexico are vital to local economies, migrants can offer their greatest assets: they speak Spanish and they culturally identify with Hispanic neighbors. For instance, in Tucson, Arizona, some $80 million is spent at Christmas by Mexican tourists who patronize local businesses. It has become almost unthinkable for merchants not to have a Spanish-speaking employee who understands these patrons.

**How was the PPEP-TEC program established?**

After securing funds from the Jobs Training Partnership Act, PPEP-TEC started Training for Employment Centers within the primary agricultural regions of Arizona. A license to operate was obtained from the Arizona State Board of Private Technical and Business Schools. A Business Advisory Committee made up of potential employers such as IBM, Burr Brown, Hughes Aircraft, National Semi-Conductor, Gates Lear Jet of Arizona, Diamond's and Mervyn's Department stores, and others was formalized to provide input into the training process. After a marketing study was completed, the centers hired local instructors who had a cultural and linguistic identification with the target population. Employment workers then recruited, screened, and tested some 60 farm workers who comprised the first participants. Each training center was then equipped with IBM microcomputers, word processing equipment, and electronic typewriters. Housing and stipends for the participants provided income maintenance for a six-month training process.

**What are the desired outcomes of the computer training program?**

It is anticipated that this special program will have a number of desired effects. Specifically, participants will acquire or develop the following:

- A high level of self-respect and confidence in the ability to perform on the job.
- Proficiency in the basic skills of advanced clerical business technology.
- Coping skills necessary for a rewarding work experience.
- A strong commitment to and understanding of the basic principles of the work ethic in this modern industrial and high-technology agribusiness setting.



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**What kinds of advanced business technology skills are taught the farm workers?**

In order to assist the farm workers in breaking out of the "migrant cycle," the marketable skills are taught in the following courses, which constitute the 6-month, 8-hour-a-day training program:

- Microcomputer Technology
- Data Base Management
- Word Processing
- Data Processing
- Business Machines
- Electronic Typewriters
- Clerical Skills
- Accounting
- Spelling

**What kinds of training-related problems have been encountered?**

Unfortunately, the farm workers do not simply discard their short-handled hoes and develop proficiency on the keyboard of an IBM Personal Computer. There are many personal adjustments that must be made. The trauma of relocation away from the support of the strong family system which exists among farm workers necessitates a new spirit of independence. Earned income of the participants is replaced by compensation in the form of a stipend equal to minimum wage. However, because of longer work days in the fields, it is very tempting for a farm worker to leave the class during the height of the agricultural season and make more money than the stipend offers. Thus, the participants must be constantly reminded that they must develop long-term goals for personal and professional improvement. The most difficult obstacle for most program participants is the adjustment to a classroom environment, dress code, and life in an urban setting. They must also acquire discipline required to work in high-technology industries or agribusiness.

**How have these problems been handled?**

Vocational and psychological counseling is available for the participants on a regular or on-call basis. Other support systems in the community, such as churches and service clubs, have been mobilized to meet their needs. Also, direct lines of communication back to the home environment are maintained.

Language, physical, and cultural barriers are best handled by having bilingual and bicultural instructors. To accommodate this need, PPEP-TEC instructions come in four languages: English, Spanish, Navajo, and sign language.

The Business and Advisory Committee members help the participants to overcome negative feelings of self-worth. For example, Mervyn's and Diamond's Department Stores provide a clothing fashion show and cosmetic "make-over" of the participants, and the Western Savings and Loans Associations offer an assertiveness training program.

Other local industries contribute by taking a farm worker/participant into their business for on-the-job experience during a two-week period.

**How are the program graduates moved into the labor market for which they have become eligible?**

The stated objective of the program is to break the "migrant cycle"; therefore, placement after training is critical, as is follow-up. The PPEP Employment Specialists (job developers), with the assistance of the Business Advisory Council Members, find meaningful jobs consistent with participant training and interests.

Once workers are placed, the PPEP Employment Specialist works with the local business management to insure a smooth transition. Also, periodic checks are made 30, 60, 90, and 120 days after placement to follow the progress of the participants. Some of the first graduates have been placed successfully with IBM, Gates Lear Jet, and National Semi-Conductor.

**Related Resource Materials**


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